

Reading Turkish Tea Leaves: Speaker's Election Will Offer Clues to Political Future

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Brief Analysis

The very process of choosing a parliamentary speaker will suggest whether a governing coalition will be formed, and including which parties, or whether Turkey will see early elections.

On June 30, the Turkish parliament will convene following the June 7 elections to elect its new speaker. None of the four parties -- the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), or Nationalist Action Party (MHP) -- has a majority in the legislature. Following the speaker's election in a secret ballot, a forty-five-day period will commence during which a new government must be formed. If no government is formed by this deadline, as affirmed by a simple-majority vote of confidence in the legislature, the parliament will be dissolved and early elections called. But before then, the very process of electing a speaker, even though by secret ballot, will provide valuable hints as to whether a coalition will be formed, and including which parties, or whether Turkey will see early elections.

The Turkish constitution stipulates a possible four-round system for electing a new speaker. In each of the first two rounds, both to be held June 30, the winning candidate would need a two-thirds majority in the 550-seat legislature, equivalent to 367 votes. In the third round, to be held July 1, a simple parliamentary majority, equal to 276 seats, would suffice. In the fourth, runoff round, also slated for July 1 and assuming no single candidate has thus far gained a simple majority, the two top candidates from the third round would face off, with the victor becoming the next speaker.

Currently, the AKP has 258 seats in the legislature, followed by the CHP with 132 seats. The MHP and HDP have 80 deputies each. So far, all the parties, except the AKP, have announced their candidates for the speaker position. The CHP has picked Deniz Baykal, the party's previous chair. The MHP has selected Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, who ran as the joint MHP-CHP candidate for president in the August 2014 elections against AKP leader and now president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. And the HDP has chosen Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, a former AKP politician with Kurdish

roots who has broken ranks with Erdogan, joining the HDP in February 2015.

The HDP and MHP, which have already ruled out entering a shared coalition government, are unlikely to vote for each other's speaker candidate. It is therefore implausible that the three opposition parties, the CHP, MHP, and HDP, would band together to elect a speaker -- just as they are unlikely to form a coalition government excluding the AKP.

Looking more closely at the numbers, the AKP and CHP have a combined 390 seats in the legislature, while the AKP-plus-MHP *or* AKP-plus-HDP tally adds up to 338. When combining the CHP total with that of either the MHP or HDP, the total is only 212, well short of a simple majority. Given this legislative arithmetic, in the first three rounds the next speaker could be elected only with votes from the AKP and another party, an alliance that would hint at a potential coalition between the AKP and that party. Here are three possible outcomes in this regard, including one pointing to early elections:

- If a speaker were elected during either of the first two rounds of voting, on June 30, garnering 367 votes or more, this would indicate an AKP-CHP coalition government in the offing.
- If a speaker were elected in the third round of voting, on July 1, garnering 276 votes or more, this would suggest a possible coalition government between the AKP and either the MHP or the HDP. (For more on coalition government scenarios, see Part 1 of a PolicyWatch series for [the AKP-CHP option \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-1-the-akp-chp-option\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-1-the-akp-chp-option); Part 2 for [the AKP-MHP option \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-2-the-akp-mhp-option\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-2-the-akp-mhp-option); and Part 3 for [the AKP-HDP option \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-3-the-akp-hdp-option\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-political-scene-post-election-part-3-the-akp-hdp-option).)
- If, alternatively, the speaker is elected in the July 1 final runoff round with fewer than half of the votes, this would suggest that the parties will be unable to work together to form a government. As noted, in order to take office Turkish governments must receive a vote of confidence from at least 276 deputies, constituting a simple majority. The election of the speaker in the fourth and final round would almost certainly hint at early parliamentary elections.

Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family Fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute, and author of [The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-rise-of-turkey-the-twenty-first-centurys-first-muslim-power\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-rise-of-turkey-the-twenty-first-centurys-first-muslim-power), named by the Foreign Policy Association as one of the ten most important books of 2014. ❖

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